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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 3997th meeting of the Security Council, held on 7 May 1999, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in Georgia", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council has considered the report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, of 21 April 1999 (S/1999/460).

"The Security Council reiterates its demand that both sides widen their commitment to the United Nations-led peace process, continue to seek and engage in dialogue, expand their bilateral contacts and display without delay the necessary will to achieve substantial results on the key issues of the negotiations, and underlines the necessity for the parties to achieve an early and comprehensive political settlement, which includes a settlement on the political status of Abkhazia within the State of Georgia, which fully respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders.

"The Security Council reaffirms the unacceptability of the demographic changes resulting from the conflict and the imprescriptible right of all refugees and displaced persons affected by the conflict to return to their homes in secure conditions and calls upon the parties to address this issue urgently by agreeing and implementing effective measures to guarantee the security of those who exercise their unconditional right to return.

"The Security Council welcomes in this context the decision of the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of 2 April 1999 on further measures to settle the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1999/392). The Council notes the conclusions of the eighth session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides held on 29 April 1999.

"The Security Council expresses its deep concern at the failure of the parties to reach an agreement on the terms for the return of refugees and displaced persons to the Gali region and measures for economic rehabilitation. The Council stresses the need for them to conclude

urgently such an agreement, which would make it possible for the international community to participate in this effort, as well as an agreement on peace and guarantees for the prevention of armed confrontation.

"The Security Council welcomes the improvements in the security situation but notes that the general situation in the conflict zone still remains tense and unstable.

"The Security Council urges the parties to exercise great restraint in their responses to any incidents arising on the ground and to take concrete steps to improve their cooperation in this field. The Council demands that both sides take immediate and determined measures to put a stop to the activities by armed groups, including the continued laying of mines, and to establish a climate of confidence allowing refugees and displaced persons to return. The Council further demands that both sides ensure a full separation of forces from the ceasefire line, in accordance with the ceasefire protocol signed on 25 May 1998, and establish a joint investigation mechanism without further delay.

"The Security Council welcomes the continued contribution that the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the CIS (CIS Peacekeeping Force) have made to stabilizing the situation in the zone of conflict and notes that the working relationship between UNOMIG and the CIS Peacekeeping Force has remained good.

"The Security Council reaffirms the importance it attaches to the security of UNOMIG and of all international personnel and recalls the obligations of both sides in this regard. The Council welcomes the steps taken to enhance the operations and security of UNOMIG.

"The Security Council strongly supports the sustained efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative with the assistance of the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator as well as of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to prevent hostilities, to protect human rights, and to advance a settlement."